

Mass Series #4 - Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Eucharistic Prayer

The Eucharistic Prayer of every Mass begins with a three-part dialogue between the priest and the people. He issues a greeting, urging them to lift their hearts and give thanks. The people affirm each phrase. This dialogue entered the liturgy by the fourth century to introduce the prayer that evolved into Eucharistic Prayer II. It solemnly begins the Church's most solemn prayer.

The Preface begins the great prayer of thanksgiving by mentioning some reasons why the community gives thanks on this particular day. It is called the "Preface" because of its introductory function.

The heart of the Mass is the Eucharistic Prayer. We have a variety of prayers to choose from, but they all begin with the Preface dialogue ("The Lord be with you. . . . Lift up your hearts") and end with the Great Amen. The assembly sings several acclamations: the Holy, the Memorial Acclamation, and the Great Amen. But the rest of the prayer is verbalized by the priest. Even though the priest alone speaks the words out loud, all in the assembly join their hearts together in prayer with him.

At one point during a typical Eucharistic Prayer, the priest extends his hands over the bread and wine and prays that the Holy Spirit will change them into the Body and Blood of Christ. We call this prayer by its traditional Greek title, *epiclesis*. By calling on the Holy Spirit, the Roman Catholic Church makes plain what it has always believed, that the bread and wine becomes the Body and Blood of Christ due to the action of the Spirit.

The Memorial Acclamation announces the community's belief in the death and Resurrection of Christ. It is sung or recited by the entire assembly during the Eucharistic Prayer of every Mass after we hear the words of Jesus at the Last Supper. This brief statement summarizes the core mystery of the faith we hold.

"Amen" means "So be it." It means "I believe." It means "The truth has been spoken." And it's a little like clicking the "Send" button after you've written an email. It gives your prayer the wings it uses to fly toward God in heaven.

The Great Amen is great because of what it says Amen to. Throughout the Eucharistic Prayer, we have been praying in thanksgiving for the wonderful things God does for us, and we have been praying in petition for the living and the dead. Most importantly, we have been praying that the Holy Spirit would change the bread and wine on the altar into the Body and Blood of Christ. This prayer, the most powerful prayer in human history, concludes with an Amen that can only be called "great."